



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

July 14, 2006

# News Release

## **Philadelphia money remitter pleads guilty to money laundering charges** **-- Plea is latest in series of ICE actions against unscrupulous remitters in Philadelphia --**

PHILADELPHIA, PA. – John Kelleghan, the acting Special Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Philadelphia, today announced that the owner and in-house compliance officer of a north Philadelphia money remitting agency has pleaded guilty to 15 counts of money laundering and one count of criminal forfeiture in connection with a scheme to send to the Dominican Republic more than \$92,000 that he believed to be narcotics proceeds.

Juan Maria, a 47-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen born in the Dominican Republic, is the owner and anti-money laundering compliance officer of Genoveba Communications, Inc. (GCI). GCI is a licensed money remitting agency for BHD Corporation, Vigo Remittance, and Merchant's Express Money Order Company.

Maria entered his guilty plea yesterday in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. As part of the plea, Maria forfeited \$20,265 in cash that was previously seized by ICE agents during the execution of a search warrant at GCI. According to the guilty plea, Maria faces a maximum potential sentence of 300 years and a fine of \$7.5 million. Maria is scheduled to be sentenced on September 18, 2006.

Maria's guilty plea was based upon charges contained in a criminal information filed on May 30, 2006 which alleged that he laundered approximately \$92,750 in funds to the Dominican Republic and exchanged cash for international money orders with funds that he believed to be narcotics proceeds. Specifically, Maria conducted 28 international wire transfers under various false names and structured the sale of money orders in an attempt to conceal and disguise the nature, location, source, ownership and control of what he believed to be the proceeds of narcotics trafficking.

"Money remitters who are willing to move illicit proceeds overseas pose significant homeland security threats. They serve as magnets for criminal organizations and even terrorist groups looking to wire transfer their dirty money abroad with no questions asked. Closing down this vulnerability is a priority for ICE," said Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Kelleghan.

Maria's guilty plea is the latest in a series of ICE enforcement actions against Philadelphia money remitters involved in illegal activity. In May of this year, a Philadelphia money remitter pleaded guilty to criminal charges of loan fraud, structuring financial transactions, and operating an illegal

money transmittal business. The same month, another local money remitter was sentenced to 30 months incarceration for laundering money that he believed to be drug proceeds.

**Venord Multiple Services:**

On May 24, Seide Venord was sentenced to 30 months in federal incarceration, ordered to make restitution of \$25,140, ordered to forfeit \$4,660 in cash, and ordered to pay \$1,000 in court fines at sentencing in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Venord was convicted in January 2006 on 43 counts for his role in laundering roughly \$267,195 in funds that he believed to be drug proceeds through his Philadelphia money remitting business to the Dominican Republic.

Venord was the owner and in-house anti-money laundering compliance officer for Venord Multiple Services. In this position, Venord was a licensed money remitter for Western Union, Vigo Remittance, and Girosol Corporation, all money remitting businesses licensed in Pennsylvania.

Venord conducted financial transactions that were represented to him to be proceeds of illegal drug trafficking. Venord arranged for the international transfers of money and exchanged blank money orders for cash. Specifically, Venord structured these transactions to evade the federal currency transaction requirements and permitted the use of false identification and fictitious names to prevent discovery of the money sender's true identity.

**Medina Tax & Travel:**

On May 23, Sheikh Mohammed Khurshan, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Bangladesh, pleaded guilty in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania to one count of operating an unlicensed money remitting business, one count of attempted loan fraud, and one count of structuring financial transactions. Khurshan was the president and owner of Medina Tax and Travel and the appointed accountant of the Majid Al-Jamia mosque in Philadelphia.

An ICE investigation revealed that Khurshan often structured deposits of cash in \$9,000 increments every few days into local Philadelphia banks order to evade the federal \$10,000 currency transaction requirements. When the account balance reached \$20,000 to \$40,000, Khurshan would conduct a large wire transfer depleting the account. Most of the funds were sent to a company in Singapore. Using these techniques, Khurshan transmitted more than \$900,000 overseas, although he was not licensed in the state of Pennsylvania to operate a money transmittal business.

A federal grand jury returned a sealed indictment against Khurshan on May 26, 2005. Khurshan voluntarily surrendered to federal authorities on June 1, 2005. Khurshan is scheduled to be sentenced in August 2006. He faces a maximum sentence of 40 years incarceration; five years supervised release, a fine of \$1.5 million, \$400,000 in asset forfeiture, and a \$300 special assessment.

For decades, money transmittal businesses (including *hawalas*) have proven vulnerable to criminal exploitation. The USA Patriot Act of 2001 enhanced ICE's ability to combat the international movement of illicit funds through these businesses by amending the 18 USC 1960 statute. As a result, money service businesses in the United States are required to be registered with the U.S. Treasury Department and be licensed by the appropriate state authorities.

ICE agents have used this statute to aggressively target unlicensed money transmittal businesses and underground *hawalas* nationwide. From 2002 through 2005, these ICE investigations resulted in the arrest of more than 155 individuals and 142 indictments, as well as the seizure of \$25 million.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21<sup>st</sup> century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*